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ABSTRACT

The paper summarizes recruitment and retention approaches designed to assist rural school administrators in securing/holding well-prepared/qualified teachers and presents findings from a 1985 study that examined teachers' perceptions of professional preparation. Outlined recruitment approaches include paying candidate's interview and moving expenses, hiring husband/wife teams, emphasizing local school autonomy, and providing comprehensive fringe benefits. Retention strategies include preschool/ongoing orientation programs, new teacher/master teacher pairing, regular classroom visits by administrators, professional days for school visitation and workshop/conference participation. Findings from a study of 1984 teacher education graduates from the Universities of Iowa and Vermont indicated that those accepting teaching positions in rural schools considered other benefits (school climate, sense of community, "traditional" social values) more important than starting salary, but professional conditions and growth potential must exist to retain teachers. Responses from 170 teachers in urban (43%), suburban (26%), and rural (30%) districts reported average annual salaries of $14,004, $14,042, and $12,221, respectively. Respondents from suburban and urban school districts rated their preparation higher than those in rural districts. Findings support the perception that teacher education is not providing adequate preparation of teachers for rural districts and suggest that recruitment/retention of teachers might be further complicated by that deficiency. (NEC)

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RECRUITMENT AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS: A RURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Ensuring the basic need for well prepared and qualified teachers in rural schools looms as a major problem. School administrators with greatest difficulty recruiting teachers represent schools and communities which are often characterized as:

*having small enrollments (often less than 300 students),

*having less than 2,500 inhabitants,

*having limited school and community facilities,

*being located some distance from major metropolitan areas,

*tending to be insulated from societal trends or changes,

*and existing in a fishbowl environment.

These schools represent 67 percent of all schools and enroll 33 percent of all school children. One-quarter of all school districts in the United States still enroll fewer than 300 student which includes more than half a million students and fifty thousand teachers. These numbers illustrate the potential magnitude of the teacher recruitment problem facing rural schools.

The problem of teacher recruitment in rural areas is further complicated by teacher turn-over. The major contributions to the turn-over problem are the following:

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Cedar Rapids, Iowa
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*Preservice preparation is presently more suitable for large, metropolitan schools than for small, rural schools.

*Career orientations fail to recognize that experience in small schools advances future plans and goals.

*Teachers often have inadequate experiential and psychological preparation for the demands and limitations of small schools and rural communities.

*There may be a mismatch of personal value systems and rural lifestyles.

*There is discontinuity between idyllic expectations and harsh realities.

*Administrators of small school districts sometimes employ inappropriate and inadequate recruitment strategies.

*Limited opportunities for professional development exist.

Not only has the recruitment and retention of teachers been bothersome to rural areas but the future does not bode well either. Most population projections forecast a dramatic reversal of the past decade's steady decline of school age children. A dramatic rise in school enrollments are expected for the decade of the nineties. This enrollment increase, coupled with the apparent move back to rural areas, suggest that rural areas will absorb a significant number of new children. (Snyder, 1984) According to Education Week (1983), rural areas have already experienced an increase in population from 53.6 million in 1970 to 59.5 million in 1980. In fact, in a recent Gallup Poll (1985), nearly half of Americans who live in or near cities "would move to places with 10,000 people or

fewer if they had the chance..." It is clear that rural areas are not going be spared the impact of increased school enrollments and will face stiff competition from urban counterparts in the recruitment and retention of teachers.

It is well known that rural schools, because of their limited financial resources, have not paid competitive salaries. The lagging salaries of rural professionals have contributed to recruitment and retention problems. As with most problems, there are a variety of solutions suggested by educational administrators and educational researchers. Space does not permit an extensive review of plausible strategies that might be employed by rural school administrators. However, we would like to highlight some promising practices which served as a conceptual base for this study. A summary of suggested practices follows:

RECRUITMENT APPROACHES

*Pay expenses of candidate to visit school district and moving expenses.

*Show willingness to hire husband and wife teams.

*Provide assistance in locating housing and employment for spouse.

*Emphasize local school autonomy.

*Involve local community patrons and civic groups in recruitment efforts.

*Provide an aggressive fringe benefit package that includes health benefit plan, supplemental retirement plan, dental plan, personal leave, life insurance, and financial support for graduate studies.

*Stress special features - geography, climate, historical sites, cuisine, and isolation.

*Emphasize the inherent advantages of small schools but be honest about their limitations as well.

*Seek individuals who resided in rural areas before and who are most likely to return.

*Emphasize the quality of rural life and the availability of leisure time activities.

RETENTION APPROACHES

*Preschool and ongoing orientation program.

*Immediate community involvement in welcoming and including the new teacher in a variety of community programs.

*Pairing new teacher with a master teacher.

*Regular classroom and school wide visits by district and building administrators.

*Involvement and opportunities to express inservice needs to school administrators.

*Professional days to visit other schools and to participate in workshops and conferences.

It is evident that many of these strategies require added financial resources but not all. Many represent more a set of values and life style.

Whether any of these reasons are related to the actual acceptance of teaching positions is unclear. For what reasons does one accept a teaching position in a rural school district as opposed to a suburban or urban school district? For what reasons would an individual accept a teaching

position in another school district? How well were the teachers prepared? It is assumed that school administrators, particularly those from rural school districts, need to better understand the reasons teachers accept positions, choose to remain, and perceive the adequacy of their preparation. The first section of this paper examines the reasons for selecting as well as leaving the present position while the second section examines teachers' perceptions of preparation.

Respondents:

Before considering the results of this study, it should be noted that of the 401 questionnaires mailed, forty-seven percent (N=188) were returned and forty-two percent (N=170) were usable. Of the respondents, eighty-one percent (N=120) were female and nineteen percent (32) were male.* The proportion of male to female respondents not teaching was quite similar to those who were teaching. Of the respondents teaching fifty percent (N=50) were teaching in elementary schools, thirty-five percent (N=35) were teaching in secondary schools, five percent (N=5) were teaching in preschools, four percent (N=4) were teaching in K-12 settings, while the remaining four percent (N=4) were in unclassified settings. Twenty-six percent of the respondents were teaching in suburban school districts, forty-three percent in urban school districts, and thirty percent were teaching in rural school districts. Of those teaching in rural school districts, thirty-three percent were males, while fifteen percent of those accepting teaching positions in suburban school districts and eleven percent of those teaching

*Totals on individual items will vary given some respondents did not respond to every item.

in urban school districts were males. In addition, the average reported salaries for those teaching in suburban schools was $14,042, for those teaching in urban schools was $14,004, and for those teaching in rural schools was $12,221. These differences in salaries among urban, suburban, and rural school districts is already well documented in other studies, but an explanation for the disproportionate number of males accepting teaching positions in rural school districts is not available.

SECTION ONE

Teacher Recruitment:

As part of a more extensive study, a questionnaire, Teacher Recruitment and Preparation Questionnaire (TRPQ), was mailed during April, 1985, to individuals identified at the Universities of Iowa and Vermont as completing undergraduate programs in teacher education during the 1983-84 academic year. The section of the TRPQ pertinent to recruitment requested the respondents to rate the importance of forty-five reasons pertaining to the community, the schools, and salary/benefits in accepting their present teaching position. The respondents were asked to rate each identified factor on a Likert type scale from very positive influence to a very negative influence.

When comparing the reasons of the respondents from suburban, urban, and rural school districts for accepting their present teaching, the differences are minor (Figure 1). In Figure 1 the five highest rated reasons for each cluster; community, the school, and salary/benefits are presented. The differences in the cluster of salary/benefits, which consisted of eighteen items, are slight. Those accepting teaching positions in rural

school districts considered other benefits more important than starting salary. One might get the impression that these respondents were more concerned about "settling in" to the community whereas their counterparts in urban and suburban settings seem to be more concerned about their "professional future." In the cluster, the school, which consisted of seventeen items, the respondents across types of school districts considered the school climate and support as important. This sense of support no matter what the source seems important. How this support is communicated to teachers is not clear, but its importance is documented by other studies and should receive special attention by administrators. One reason given by those teaching in urban and suburban school districts as important was the reputation of the school district. Again, how the respondents were able to determine the reputation of a school district is unclear. However, such a reason again implies a concern for professional identity and fits the initial pattern identified in the cluster of salary/benefits. This is speculative at this time but certainly has implications for the image of rural school districts. With the increased concerns about the "professionalization" of teachers, rural school administrators need to examine how to improve their settings on this dimension - particularly if they wish to compete more effectively with urban and suburban school administrators in the recruitment and retention of classroom teachers who value a professional identity.

The difference in the ratings of the eighteen items in the cluster, community, tend to support the hypothesis that those teaching in rural school districts value a sense of community and what is referred to as

"traditional" social values. Whereas, teachers in urban/suburban settings were more concerned about continued personal and professional growth through cultural and continuing education opportunities. Administrators in rural school districts need to examine more closely the common perceptions held in regard to cultural and continuing education opportunities. Rural school administrators should consider how to stress the cultural/continuing education opportunities for teachers which exist in their geographic area and how to improve upon this factor, if needed. The image of the pastoral setting with a cultural void is outdated and inaccurate. Cultural and educational opportunities come in many forms and should be recognized.

Acceptance of Another Teaching Position:

In addition to identifying reasons teachers accepted their present position, the TRPQ asked the respondents to identify the five most important reasons for which they would consider taking a teaching position in another district. The five most frequently chosen reasons for considering another teaching position by type of school district (e.g., rural, urban, and suburban) are presented in Figure 2. Without a doubt, salary and fringe benefits are the major reasons for considering another position. Also, a sense of support continues to have an important influence when considering a teaching position or changing school systems. For teachers in rural settings, the support from parents/community is important, whereas those in urban/suburban settings saw the support from the administration as most important.

The implications of the recruitment and retention survey are compelling if administrators, no matter what the setting, want to attract and retain teachers. The salary/benefits must be competitive, but a sense of support and the presence of a pleasant school climate are essential. This is recognized in other professionals but continues to trouble our society as to how such conditions can be attained in the public sector which is largely dependent on tax monies for its fiscal resources. In any regard, school administrators are faced with the challenge of creating professional conditions in which teachers can find rewards and a professional identity. It is clear from our research and other studies that it is not enough to focus on effective methods for the recruitment of teachers, but administrators need to reward their teachers and create conditions for professional growth.

SECTION TWO

The respondents rated their preparation on fifteen dimensions from very good (5) to very poor (1). The respondents could also indicate whether the dimension even existed in the program. The results are summarized in Figure 3. The general pattern reflects a tendency for the respondents in suburban school districts to rate their preparation higher than the those in urban and rural school districts. In fact, those in urban school districts also tended to rate their preparation higher than those in rural districts. Caution must be exercised in the interpretation of the data presented in this analysis. For example, the data presentation does not account for the grade level differences and one would expect differences between elementary and secondary teachers on dimensions like special

subjects (Item Five). Teacher education is frequently criticized for not providing adequate preparation of teachers for rural school districts and these data might give support to that perspective. Obviously, these data are not conclusive, but it suggests that the recruitment and retention of teachers might be further complicated by the lack of adequate preparation. If teachers lack adequate preparation it then becomes a staff development issue for rural school districts.

We are reminded of a comment by a classroom teacher in a rural elementary school who, when queired about the reasons her particular school appeared to be very effective in introducing a number of needed changes over the past five years and was being reputed as a school to which other teachers wish to teach in, stated: "We feel as though we are professionals and the board of education and administrators treat us that way." Over this period of time the school board and administrators had introduced, in consultation with teachers, a number of policy changes which included:

*reimbursement of tuition for one graduate course per academic year;

*release time for working on curriculum, units of instruction, or to visit other classrooms or school districts;

*inservice workshops designed and arranged by classroom teachers with administrative support and involvement;

*effective negotiations with area university to offer in the district graduate level courses which tied in with local curricular and instructional projects;

*hiring of teachers during the summer to attend summer institutes and to work on curriculum development projects;

*and participation in a regional network of teachers, administrators, and school board members who have sponsored several conferences on outcome based learning.

These pursuits emerged over time and presently are being fully supported by the principal stakeholders, including classroom teachers in a rural school district. This commitment and professionalism is not one of theory but of practice and has been attained by ordinary people in recognizing the importance of creating an environment for supporting teachers in becoming more effective in their teaching - a worthy goal for all school systems but a must for rural school systems if they are to be successful in obtaining and retaining their most valuable resource, their classroom teachers.

FIGURE I: FIVE HIGHEST RATED REASONS IN EACH CLUSTER FOR ACCEPTING PRESENT TEACHING POSITION BY TYPE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT

Type of School District	Community	School	Salary and Benefits
RURAL: Less than 2,500 in population or less than 1,000 persons per square mile for extended city areas. (N = 26)	Community involvement opportunities. Relatively close to my home. Traditional community and family values. Community commitment to quality education. School/Community emphasis on student learning and achievement.	Limited number of extra meetings. Support from administration. Pleasant school climate (physical and social). Helpful supervision. Support from parents/community.	Paid expenses for and encouragement to attend workshops and state conventions. Fringe benefit package; including health ahd life insurance, retirement, dental plan, and personal leave. Assistance in locating housing Salary schedule that rewards. Assistance in locating job for spouse.
URBAN: Greater than 2,500 population. (N = 43)	Community commitment to quality education. School/Community emphasis on student learning and achievement. Adequate housing. Job opportunities for spouse. Social/Cultural opportunities.	Supportive colleagues. Pleasant school climate (physical and social). Support from administration. Reputation of school district. Access to resources (e.g., curriculum guides, space, equipment, films, books, etc.)	Fringe benefit package; including health and life insurance, retirement, dental plan, and personal leave. Starting salary. Paid expenses for and encouragement to attend workshops and state conventions. Salary schedule that rewards. Tuition reimbursement for graduate courses.

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FIGURE I: FIVE HIGHEST RATED REASONS IN EACH CLUSTER FOR ACCEPTING PRESENT TEACHING POSITION BY TYPE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT (continued)

Type of School District	Community	School	Salary and Benefits
SUBURBAN: Contiguous to urban area and greater than 2,500 population or 1,000 persons per square mile. (N = 30)	School/Community emphasis on student learning and achievement. Continuing education opportunities. Social/Cultural opportunities. Traditional community and family values. Relatively close to my home.	Reputation of school district. Pleasant school climate (physical and social). Supportive colleagues. Support from parents/ community. Helpful supervision.	Fringe benefit package; including health and life insurance, retirement, dental plan, and personal leave. Access to tenure after three years of teaching. Starting salary. Paid expenses for and encouragement to attend workshops and state conventions. Salary schedule that rewards.

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FIGURE II: MOST FREQUENTLY CITED REASONS TO CONSIDER ANOTHER TEACHING POSITION BY PRESENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Type of School District	Reasons
RURAL: Less than 2,500 in population or less than 1,000 persons per square mile for extended city areas. (N = 26)	Starting salary. Support from parents/community. Fringe benefit package; including health and life insurance, retirement, dental plan, and personal leave. Pleasant school climate (physical and social). Access to resources (e.g., curriculum guides, space, equipment, films, books, etc.).
URBAN: Greater than 2,500 population. (N = 43)	Starting salary. Fringe benefit package; including health and life insurance, retirement, dental plan, and personal leave. Support from administration. Pleasant school climate (physical and social). Salary schedule that rewards.

FIGURE II: MOST FREQUENTLY CITED REASONS TO CONSIDER ANOTHER TEACHING POSITION BY PRESENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (continued)

Type of School District	Reasons
SUBURBAN: Contiguous to urban area and greater than 2,500 population or 1,000 persons per square mile. (N = 30)	Starting salary. Fringe benefit package; including health and life insurance, retirement, dental plan, and personal leave. Community commitment to quality education. Salary schedule that rewards. Support from administration.

FIGURE 3: MEAN RATINGS BY SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SELECTED ASPECTS OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

ITEM	TYPES OF SCHOOL DISTRICT		
	SUBURBAN	URBAN	RURAL
1. Encouraged to pursue a wide variety of courses.	N = 25 $\bar{X}$ = 3	N = 41 $\bar{X}$ =3.41	N = 29 $\bar{X}$ =3.52
2. Acquired more than one major.	N = 17 $\bar{X}$ =3.18	N = 32 $\bar{X}$ =3.01	N = 22 $\bar{X}$ =2.23
3. Acquired more than one minor.	N = 17 $\bar{X}$ =2.48	N = 40 $\bar{X}$ =2.93	N = 21 $\bar{X}$ =2.14
4. Prepared to teach an integration of content (i.e. math and science)	N = 23 $\bar{X}$ =3.13	N = 39 $\bar{X}$ =3.64	N = 26 $\bar{X}$ =2.96
5. Prepared to teach special subjects (e.g. art, music, physical education)	N = 17 $\bar{X}$ =3.47	N = 38 $\bar{X}$ =2.79	N = 24 $\bar{X}$ =2.92
6. Prepared to teach students with a range of abilities.	N = 26 $\bar{X}$ =3.65	N = 42 $\bar{X}$ =3.55	N = 29 $\bar{X}$ =3.38
7. Provided information about the type of school in which you presently teach.	N = 24 $\bar{X}$ =2.63	N = 38 $\bar{X}$ =2.74	N = 25 $\bar{X}$ = 3
8. Provided information about various sources of assistance to teachers (e.g. ERIC: State departments of education)	N = 24 $\bar{X}$ =2.88	N = 41 $\bar{X}$ =2.66	N = 29 $\bar{X}$ =2.62
9. Student taught several age levels within a classroom.	N = 21 $\bar{X}$ =3.48	N = 36 $\bar{X}$ =3.03	N = 26 $\bar{X}$ =2.81
10. Participated in team teaching during student teaching.	N = 17 $\bar{X}$ =4.18	N = 36 $\bar{X}$ =3.47	N = 27 $\bar{X}$ =2.56
11. Was involved in school-community related activities during student teaching.	N = 24 $\bar{X}$ =3.21	N = 40 $\bar{X}$ =3.3	N = 27 $\bar{X}$ =2.89
12. Issues related to schools in rural settings were discussed.	N = 22 $\bar{X}$ =2.73	N = 41 $\bar{X}$ =2.63	N = 27 $\bar{X}$ =2.48
13. Issues related to schools in urban settings were discussed	N = 23 $\bar{X}$ =2.96	N = 41 $\bar{X}$ =3.07	N = 28 $\bar{X}$ =2.75
14. Issues related to schools in suburban settings were discussed.	N = 24 $\bar{X}$ = 3	N = 40 $\bar{X}$ =2.88	N = 28 $\bar{X}$ =2.68
15. Developed in self-confidence as a teacher.	N = 24 $\bar{X}$ =4.08	N = 42 $\bar{X}$ =4.1	N = 30 $\bar{X}$ =3.67